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Edited by E. Haldeman-Julius

The Gay Chronicle of the Monks and Nuns

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THE GAY CHRONICLE OF THE MONKS AND NUNS

In *The Debunker* for April, 1929, Lloyd E. Smith tells how the Rev. S. Parkes Cadman recently defended the virtues of the monks. The question was: "Is it true that, as stated by E. Haldeman-Julius, a writer, the monastic lives of the monks were led in filth?" The pertinent, and impertinent, part of the answer is: "I do not know who E. Haldeman-Julius is, but he shows his ignorance when he makes a statement of that kind." With the morals of Mr. Cadman, who quite clearly first took the words about the monks from Mr. Haldeman-Julius' book (and garbled them), then said that he did not know who Mr. Haldeman-Julius was, and thirdly remarked that the naughty epithets really applied to Mr. Haldeman-Julius himself (with whose work he seemed to be painfully familiar); I am not concerned. But Mr. Haldeman-Julius seems to think that I know a little about monks and he has asked me to give my customary courteous attention to the cleric; and here it is.

A week after receiving this copy of *The Debunker*, let me say by way of introduction, a correspondent sent me a charming little history of the body of English monks to which I once belonged. He had visited my old monastery, seen the sweet, edifying life of the penitents, and received this pious souvenir as he left. It was written by one of the monks,

and it concentrated a quite remarkable amount of the odor of sanctity in a few pages. The friars who have died within the last twenty years were positively embalmed in virtue. One merely wondered why the English cities they had so long made fragrant with their virtues did not witness countless miracles. So my correspondent wanted to know if I knew the monk writer and the saintly monks he described.

I sure do: I have seen most of them slightly drunk, and a man does not hide much then. The writer of the book himself figures very prominently in my *Twelve Years in a Monastery.* He twice bolted from the very friary in which I lived in London, and, though on one occasion he thoughtfully took with him the large special collection we had just made in church, he was starved into surrender and return. So it appears that he is still teaching Catholic Truth. The dead friars whom he canonizes were boozers almost to a man. Of one of them his own superior (a strict man, this) told me that if you put whiskey before him and swore you would shoot him if he touched it, he would drink it; and he generally got his whiskey in the homes of Catholic women while their husbands were at work. All of these friars kept bottles in their own rooms, besides the communal potations every week. A number of them had their names coupled with those of women. They were, as a body, stupid, sensual, and in some degree or other hypocritical. Not one in ten had any deep religious feeling. Thus are Roman Cath-

olics doped with Catholic Truth, and then forbidden to read me.

If this is conventual virtue in the lands of heretics in the twentieth century—and, though my book still, after thirty years, sells numbers of copies annually, there has never been the least reply to it—you will be fairly well prepared to hear the sad story of the monks of the Middle Ages. Let me first repeat what my friend, Mr. Haldeman-Julius, does say in his *Outline of Bunk*, and you will see that I justify every line of it. Criticizing a previous attempt of the Rev. Cadman to curry favor with Roman Catholics ("so large a body of our fellow-citizens," etc.) by talking bunk about the monks, he said:

> The facts are that monasticism was the most noxious weed of medieval ignorance: that those monks were stupid, superstitious, and terribly opposed to all culture and humanity; that they lived in a crazy, cruel, and filthy manner; that no single virtue could be ascribed to them, save that they withdrew from the common world to practice their insanity.

I am prepared to dot every i and cross every t in that. It does not mean that there never was a saintly monk, but that the saintliness, where it existed, had other vices and repulsive practices; nor that there never was a learned monk, but that the learning was always peculiar and much of it pernicious. It means that from the time the plague came into Europe the monks were generally ignorant, slothful, and sensual, and that precisely where they strictly followed their rules their ideal was a superstition and their lives generally

worthless to the race. It happens that I am just going to begin a very thorough history of the Church of Rome, with full references, so that I need not here give more than general references to the Christian writers of every age whom I am going to quote.

It was in the year 341 A. D. that the fiery and rather unscrupulous St. Athanasius, whose famous Creed, Mr. Shaw says, ought now to have the additional and final clause, "And I believe that Athanasius was a damned fool," brought to Rome the first two monks that ever appeared in it. They came, as you will be aware, from a vast colony that peopled the Egyptian desert and overflowed into contiguous lands. That it was a wonderful and unique invention of Christian piety that men and women should forswear the comforts of home and city in order to keep their virtue intact is, of course, nonsense. There were, when the Egyptian epidemic began in the second half of the third century, Buddhist monasteries all over Asia. There had several centuries earlier been celibate communities in Egypt and Judea. Earlier still there had been Pythagorean communities in Italy, Jainist monasteries of the strictest type in India, and so on. The world had been steadily developing the disease of asceticism for a thousand years.

But there were two or three distinctive features of this Christian asceticism. Yes, let us be quite just and candid, and let the Rev. Cadman have fair play. The new monks went far beyond all their pagan predecessors: they deified stinking filth, gross ignorance, and mur-

derous fanaticism. The poor devils could not be trusted by their superiors to have a bath, and Egypt is pretty warm. Some, out in the desert, even wore no clothes but their abnormally developed hair, and they crawled over the rocky ledges like new types of beasts. Some lived on the top of columns, not even coming down for sanitary purposes. Simeon Stylites lived thirty years on the top of a high column, and we can quite easily believe the pious ladies who came to pray at the foot of the column that he stank even at sixty feet. His legs were ulcerated, and when the worms fell out, another monk was directed to put them back again. The father of them all, Anthony, lived to be more than a hundred, yet boasted that he had never washed his feet. The virgin Silvia, though sixty years old and diseased from her filth, never washed more than her fingers. When fifty thousand of these beauties met for a common service on Easter morning I should imagine you could have cut the odor of sanctity with a knife.

Yes, let us grant the Rev. Cadman this heroism of virtue. I am only sorry that he had not the privilege of living in ancient Oxyrhynchus, where thirty thousand monks and nuns, who never bathed, exhaled their virtues. You will find pages of this stuff in Lecky's *History of European Morals*, with references to the lives of the saints, so I need not linger. But Lecky says very little about the other distinctions of Christian monks. They were mostly ex-slaves or poor workers, so perhaps the dirt felt homely, when one did not aim at the

exalted holiness of Anthony and Simeon; and, when I ponder a little, I am not sure that the rigorous sacrifice of all knowledge which they made—the one vow to which they were *all* faithful—would really be very onerous to them. Unfortunately conviction is generally strongest where knowledge is least, and these swarms of tens of thousands of monks terrorized whole cities. Often their leaders displaced bishops, who were occasionally murdered, and treated even archbishops with appalling violence. You should read about the Council at Ephesus in the year 449, where crowds of these odoriferous creatures dictated to the bishops, at the point of the knife, what was real truth about the nature of Christ; or how in the fifth century these fierce fanatics, with violence and bloodshed, compelled the Church to agree that Mary was the Mother of God. But you probably know how they tore the flesh from the bones of the venerable Hypatia, which is only one episode in their long reign of violence. I will not say confidently that one might not find something remotely approaching this violence in the history of the monks of Tibet, but let us not be punctilious. Cadman can have them. They were sufficiently unique in their virtues.

This, perhaps he will tell his docile world, was the fiery east, where hot blood flushes the imagination and makes exaggeration and passion natural. To test monasticism we must turn to the tranquil west, to the sober Benedict and learned Cassiodorus, to the industrious abbeys which preserved agriculture and letters, and created a new art. Very well, Mr. Cad-

man; but before we leave the east for the west let me remind you of another commonplace of Christian literature. Now that historians have more or less taken the public into their confidence we all know that Europe did not bloom with new virtues when it became Christian. We know, in fact, that it passed into a phase of appalling squalor and violence. And the new apologetic is that unfortunately the Goths and Vandals fell upon Europe just at the time when Christianity courted it. We are, in fact, now asked not to look for the real fruits of Christianity in Europe, so we suppose that, since these northern barbarians never disturbed the eastern Roman Empire, which included Egypt, its real fruits are to be sought there. And quite the most conspicuous is this fungoid growth of monks and hermits in Egypt and Syria, spreading gradually as far as the navel-contemplating monks of Greece. As to the fiery blood of the east, this also is bunk. The historical fact is that Alexandria, near which the most violent army of the monks lived, was the most sober and progressive city of the old world. It had not only succeeded Athens as the metropolis of learning, but it had opened up the avenue of science and would, if its culture had not been extinguished, have inaugurated a high civilization centuries ago. So that in fact your mob of howling savage monks, inflicting a ghastly death on the learned Hypatia and then going on to destroy the whole culture of the city, are a very fit symbol of what the world owes to monasticism.

However, let us see what really happened in

Europe. Vows of chastity were, of course, quite well known in the Roman Church before Athanasius brought his freaks to entertain the city. Council after Council, from the year 305 onward, had some very ugly words to say about celibate priests who had "spiritual sisters" living in their homes. One of the first effects of the visit of the monks was to encourage this practice. .. To monasticism of the odoriferous Egyptian type even the Christians of Rome did not take kindly. Their life, said the Christian orator Lactantius, was the life of beasts, not of men. But there was a great growth of sacred virgins. Even noble ladies of Rome in their palaces on the Aventine vowed themselves to virginity, and I have no doubt that the Rev. Cadman would tell us that the presence in Rome of this "Aventine School" of holiness in the second half of the fourth century is an unquestioned fact, well known from the letters of St. Jerome to the young ladies. Quite so; but even Mr. Cadman may have wondered sometimes why these precious letters of Jerome have never been translated, or only partially, into English, and since he probably does not read Latin, I will tell him.

Because they depict the condition of the Christian world in Rome, a few decades after contact with the saintly monks of the east, as one of gross immorality and hypocrisy. It is true that Jerome praises the high virtue of his aristocratic pupils—less than a dozen in all—but he has to warn them that to preserve their virtue they must have nothing to do with the priests and sacred virgins of Rome. He does

not say that *some* of these are loose, but that they quite generally are. I will give passages from his letters in my forthcoming book and will here repeat only what he says about the fervor for virginity which the monks have inspired in Rome. He calls it a "plague" and says that the women are simply "a new genus of concubines." He scorns the pretense that they live "spiritually" with the priests and monks and sometimes, he says, occupy (spiritually) the same bed with them. In other words, the first crop of nuns, as we may call them, on European soil was within twenty years totally corrupt. The hetairae of Greece are usually mentioned with horror in Christian literature, though more learned Hellenists are not at all agreed about their characters. But the very witness to the virtue of half a dozen Roman virgins is just as emphatic about the vice and hypocrisy of all the others and of the clergy. The hetairae must not be mentioned in the same breath as this first lot of Mr. Cadman's nuns.

We do not know much about the first crop of monks in Rome and Italy. The usual story is that the beautiful ideal slowly captured the hearts of the Romans (worn and weary from vice, etc.), and that the monks were so numerous and so conspicuous for their virtues by the year 370 that a saintly bishop from Gaul, St. Martin of Tours, visiting Rome in that year, borrowed a few to take back to Gaul; that the fragrant plant again grew so rapidly that two thousand monks marched at the funeral of St. Martin; that they sent colonies to Eng-

land, Ireland, and Scotland, and that in a century or two the whole of western Europe was covered with monasteries, some containing more than a thousand monks, where learning and classical literature were preserved, where virtue and refinement found shelter from the violence of the barbarians.

A very pretty story—made by the monks, of course. Now any thoughtful man will expect that for a time at least this monastic ideal would keep bodies of men in a condition of real fervor. It was a strict logical deduction from the New Testament; the teaching of which is, in my opinion, just the rule of life of the Essenian monks of Palestine. It suited an age in which civilization was wrecked by phenomenal hordes of barbarians and there was a very general expectation that the world was coming to an end. Moreover, these monks of England, Ireland, and Scotland, who sustained the real monastic fervor longest, were for the enormously greater part agricultural laborers and had never been properly civilized. The countries became so disorganized when the Roman soldiers were withdrawn that many who inherited a little of the Roman culture took to the monasteries, and it is true that it is chiefly in these English and Irish monasteries that a very small amount of the Greco-Roman culture was preserved longest. But the immense majority of the monks were of the slave or serf class, so densely ignorant that we can well believe that the myth of a coming end of the world and a hundred-fold reward

for the virtuous would keep thousands of them for a time in some sort of discipline.

How long this lasted in any particular region we do not know, but what we do know is that from the fourth century onward the majority of the monks and nuns were hypocritical, idle, sensual, and generally immoral. In 370, as I said, Martin of Tours took a cutting of the sacred tree to Gaul. This sounds as if there was already a beautiful monastic piety in Italy, but the hard fact is that we have an imperial rescript of that very year in which the Christian Valentinian, forbids priests and monks to visit widows and orphans or accept legacies from them; and, as this seems to have thrown the pious work on bishops and nuns, the same emperor two years later forbids these also to receive legacies. We hardly need Jerome to tell us the reason. Every actor or prostitute may inherit money, he says, but the supposedly holiest figures of the Church may not. Yet he admits, and St. Ambrose agrees with him, that the law is just and necessary. From the Pope (known among the Christians of Rome as "the tickler of the ears of matrons," and openly accused of more intimate familiarities) down to the deacons and sacred virgins, the chief occupation was to get money. And they got money. What was left of the wealth of Rome passed to the churches and monks. I have only to mention another imperial decree of the time (365 A. D.) in which the Christian emperor, Valens, bitterly complains of the "cowards" who are flocking to the monasteries to escape military and civic duties, and you

see what was taking place. The sleek and idle and sensual European type of monk was rapidly succeeding the Egyptian dervish. Mr. Cadman can make his choice.

I always like to quote saints as my historical witnesses, so we will turn to the third great saint of the west, St. Augustine. A beautiful ideal, he says, time after time; and he encouraged it. His new creed played havoc with his fine intelligence. Monastery doors must be thrown wide open, he said, and no questions asked of anybody who sought admission. But he lived long enough to see the natural consequence: a swarm of bloated parasites on the community. He describes them in his little treatise *On the Work of the Monks*. Roman Africa is overrun by the creatures, he says, wandering about singly or in pairs, selling spurious relics (the trade had already begun) and "demanding the reward of their pretended holiness." He does not mention their morals, but as the whole country was profoundly immoral—it is a well-known historical fact that the savage Vandals who came presently at once started a purity campaign—we will hardly suppose that these men who lived on spurious relics and spurious virtue were exceptions.

Civilization soon perished in Africa, so we return to Europe. And again let us listen only to saints, not to wicked calumniators of piety. St. Benedict, the famous founder of the first monastic order—the Augustinian order was not founded by Augustine, but centuries later—is the next witness for Italy, and he shows us plainly that there was no improvement what-

ever between 400 and 500. When he became famous for his austerities he was appointed head of a monastery in South Italy, and the monks were so angry at his attempts to reform them that they tried to poison him. He tried again somewhere else, and a jealous priest first tried to poison him and then let loose seven pretty nude girls in the garden of his monastery. So poor Benedict went off into the wilds and founded Monte Cassino and wrote his famous Rule; and in the first chapter of that Rule you can read today what monasticism was like in Italy and why Benedict had to make a new departure. The monks of Italy are a "most wicked genus." They are "gluttons and pleasure-seekers." They roam all over Italy, singly or in twos or threes, enjoying themselves. And as we hear exactly the same story from the learned Cassiodorus and from Bishop Isidore of Seville for Spain, we see plainly that in both Italy and Spain as well as Africa the monks were generally corrupt from the first. In both countries it was popularly believed, Cassiodorus says, that the monks descended from Ananias and Saphira!

But Benedict opens the true period of monasticism, we are reminded, and from that time onward . . . From that time onward, as a matter of fact, Europe is so grossly illiterate and literature so scanty that no one on earth can say how many monasteries founded by Benedict remained virtuous or how long they remained virtuous. What we can say is that the picture which it is now usual to insert in our manuals of the history of the Middle Ages is

quite untruthful. A plan of a model monastery is given, and perhaps a woodcut of a monk at work in the writing room, preserving the classical literature for us. These historical writers ought to know that Benedictine monks were forbidden to read or copy any but religious works: that they were the grossest forgers of lives of saints and martyrs: that they did not in the whole of the next thousand years preserve one single Greek classic and they allowed a large amount of previous Roman literature to perish: and that, quite clearly, it was the dissolute and sensual monks who did copy and preserve the greater part of the Latin classics for us.

It is just as bad to depict them as models of industry. The strict monks worked partly because they needed food and partly to subdue the flesh. But to represent these few strict monasteries as "the world of monks" generally, to ignore entirely Benedict's own assurance that he founded a life for the select few because of the vile life of the majority, is not honest. To select the edifying parts of the Rule and represent that this is how monks generally lived and say nothing about Benedict's references to swarms of monastic "gluttons and pleasure-seekers" is just playing up to "our Catholic fellow citizens." Unfortunately in many cities *they* say whether a manual of history shall be used in the schools or no. And that is the literature which the Rev. Cadman consults.

However, while we have much too poor a literature of the sixth century to tell in detail the history of Benedict's reform, we have most

authentic evidence that before the end of the century wealth had corrupted many, if not most, of the Benedictine monasteries. It is another saint who tells us: Pope St. Gregory the Great. In writing his valuable *History of Sacerdotal Celibacy*, Mr. Lea overlooked the many references to the state of the monasteries in Gregory's letters, though he does give the Pope's indignant comment on the fact that in some places the monks genially become the godfathers of children born to women who had visited their monasteries. Gregory was himself a monk and founder of monasteries. But be scorned culture and is said by some of his Christian contemporaries to have burned the last great libraries that still lingered in Rome. He believed that the end of the world was near, and he frightened men into abandoning their property—to the Church, of course: that was the foundation of the immense wealth of the Papacy—but his letters reveal corruption in every part of Italy. In one region after another, his informants tell him, the clergy and the monks are generally corrupt. His whole correspondence shows that he found the monks as a body idle and vicious, and he made almost no impression on them. His own diplomacy with wealthy sinners probably encouraged them to ignore his commands. He was so friendly with the wealthy apostate monk Venantius that the man appointed the Pope guardian of his daughters at his death, and Gregory most courteously agreed and wrote to the girls about "the goodness of your parents." In other words, Venantius had paid graft.

Contemporary with Gregory, in the century following Benedict's supposed reform of the monks, was Bishop Isidore of Seville, the best prelate and scholar of the Spanish Church; and as I have already said, he gives just the same report of the monks in his own country. There is the familiar plague of wandering monks, and "the one thing in which they agree is the impurity and vagabondage of their lives." They live like "brute beasts," he says, in a "sordid" search of pleasure. So they remained until, early in the eighth century, the Moors made an end of them in Spain.

If we next turn to Gaul and Germany we find that the initial fervor had quickly degenerated. In fact Gaul had under its Frankish kings become one of the most lawless and sensual countries in Europe. The *History of the Franks*, which Bishop Gregory of Tours wrote at this period, is one of the most sordid pictures of national life that was ever written, and it confesses that the clergy and monks shared the general corruption. Pope Gregory's letters reflect the same condition, and when we find him writing, as he always does to the noble and wealthy, to one of the most openly licentious and murderous of all the Frank princesses, Brunichildis, about her "devout mind" and describing her as "filled with the piety of heavenly grace," we can understand how little influence he had on Gaul. For several centuries monasticism in France remained generally, almost universally, corrupt, and I will come back to it later.

We next, in the eighth century, get a very

interesting light on the monasteries and nunneries of England. Oh, those are the places to talk about, says the Rev. Cadman. These great abbeys with their learned Bedes and Alcuins, these last refuges of civilization in a darkening world . . . And so on. You can read that anywhere; but let me again ask you to bow to the august authority of a saint and read with me some of those terrible Latin letters which our modern clergy take care never to have translated into English. St. Boniface goes to evangelize the Germans, but he keeps in touch with his native land. In 745 he writes to Ethelbald, King of Mercia (England was broken into petty kingdoms at that time), and, although he is wonderfully polite for a saint talking to a first-rate sinner, he depicts a curious state of things. Ethelbald is, it seems, a particularly gay bachelor. He refuses to marry and is notoriously promiscuous in his amours; "and the worst of it is," says Boniface to him, "that we hear that you commit this ignominy *mostly* in monasteries with nuns and virgins consecrated to God." Worse still, he says, he hears that the nuns "*for the most part* kill the children that are born to them." It is the first and by no means the last reference to infanticide on a large scale in nunneries. The saint politely begs his "dearest son," as he calls him, not to do these naughty things; and to make the advice more effective he reminds Ethelbald that his father and another Saxon king had behaved in exactly the same way, and encouraged their nobles to do so, and come to a bad end.

This was in 745, and two years later we have an official intimation that Boniface is right about the nuns. One canon of a Council presided over by the Archbishop of Canterbury in 747 (Council of Clovesho, canon 20) runs: "Therefore, let not the houses of nuns be hotbeds of lewd conversation, feuds, drunkenness, and vice." Forty years later the Council of Chelsea has to renew the order, yet a letter of Alcuin later to the king of Northumbria shows that there is no change. So when in future you read about St. Bede and the wonderful monks of England in this century, and you are asked to believe that this was the general condition of the monastic world, remember that we have abundant and indisputable evidence that the general condition of the nunneries was one of the most open carousing and philandering with the nobles, so utterly irreligious that the nun mothers "for the most part" killed their children; and if any man asks me to believe that the monks had no share in this gaiety of the nuns he knows very little about the monastic world. It is the usual situation. A few strict Benedictine monasteries are thrust upon us as typical, and the evidence of the *general* condition is hidden to support the lie.

And all the admonitions of councils and saints availed not. We have a speech of King Edgar of the year 969 in which it is stated that a large number of the old monasteries are now used simply for licentious meetings. We have the assurance of chroniclers of the time that only two of the old monasteries, of which hun-

dreds had been built, were inhabited by monks in the middle of the tenth century; the remainder, they say, were either in ruin, or were occupied by secular priests with their wives and families, or were, as the king said, used as, to put it politely, abodes of love. One chronicler of the time says that no one but a pauper would now take the vows. But St. Dunstan reformed it all in the last quarter of the tenth century. Fighting like a monk of the desert (whose practices he partly adopted), wading through streams of blood and using appalling violence, he checked the wicked monks and nuns, and forced the clergy to become celibate. Like Pope Gregory and others he knew well that the monarch whose troops he used was one of the most vicious and dissolute, but he had no hard words for *him*. So monasteries and nunneries again covered the land, and gathered wealth—by the year 1000 more than a third of the whole wealth of England belonged to the clergy and the monks; and the Church Council of the year 1009, twenty years after the reformer's death, lets us know that the nuns are as gay as ever.

You will remember that at the same time there was a reforming monarch in Germany, Charlemagne. As the clergy, whose leaders were strict monks from England, did not attempt to interfere with his own large harem, Charlemagne was quite willing to have the monks and nuns put in order, and his biographers candidly tell us how much it was needed. In the seventeenth section of Charlemagne's Capitulary (book of decrees and regulations)

for the year 802 we read: "It has come to our ears that numbers of abominable cases of fornication have been detected in monasteries." So Charlemagne lent his soldiers to help to chasten the monks and compel them to teach the people; and twenty years after his death we find a Church Council held in his capital, Aix la Chapelle, complaining that "in some places the houses of the nuns seem to be brothels rather than convents."

We are by this time, the tenth century, at the lowest level of degradation of Europe, the age when the Papacy itself was debauched for more than a hundred years, and it would be stupid to expect to find more than a house here and there where, under some pious abbot whose fame is carried by pilgrims, a few score men of really religious sentiment gather together. There was a considerable, though by no means universal, expectation of the end of the world in the year 1000, and the chroniclers plainly tell of numbers of men and women who abandoned their property and went to live in monasteries and nunneries. But even this spasm of repentance, and the new decency that was slowly spreading from the Moors and Saracens, and the fervor for cathedral building that soon began, could do no more than raise a reformer here and there who for a time kept strict discipline in a limited number of monasteries.

In France, naturally the first country to be influenced by the Moors of Spain, we find no general reform of the disreputable state of things I described under the Frank kings. The general level of clergy, monks, and nuns re-

mained gross. Prelate after prelate tells us of the monastic disorderly houses. Bishop Hildebert of Le Mans deplores that the great abbey of Eudon is full of women and the monks spend "days of iniquity and nights of infamy." Bishop Ivo of Chartres and the builder of the great cathedral, in the monkish story of which we read that the whole region became angelic, tells us, on the contrary, that the large convent of St. Fara is "no longer a place of nuns but a brothel of diabolical women, prostituting their bodies to any sort of men." St. Abbo of Fleury, a reformed monastery, tries to reform a nearby monastery, and its monks, at the instigation of their womanfolk, brutally murder him. And for Italy we have the appalling *Book of Gomorrha* of Cardinal Damiani, which is the worst catalogue of priestly and monkish vice ever published.

But at last we have got to the twelfth century, the age of St. Bernard and of Hildebrand, of the great reforms of the monks and the enforcement of the celibacy of the clergy, of the new school life and the cathedral builders. That is how you generally read the history of these things. Let me tell you a few hard facts. Hildebrand, or Pope Gregory VII, had died in 1085. Well, we happen to have a good deal of information about the state of monasteries and nunneries in the half century after his death, for it is the age of Abelard and Heloise. The famous "love letters," as they are wrongly called, of the pair will tell you enough. "I walk my rounds, every night," says Heloise, now an abbess, "and I make those I catch abroad re-

turn to their chambers, for I remember all the adventures that happened in the convents near Paris." She is thinking chiefly of a convent of Benedictine nuns in the heart of Paris where the conduct of the nuns with the nobles of the court was so flagrant that it had to be suppressed (1107 A. D.). Cardinal Jacques de Vitry, an eminent and pious prelate of the time, tells us that, apart from the nunneries of his own Cistercian order, "there is not a convent in France fit for a good woman to live in." Other writers of the time, as well as Abelard, say the same. Heloise, after the castration of Abelard, retired to the nunnery at Argenteuil, two or three miles from the great abbey of St. Denis. It was rumored that Heloise was the daughter of the abbess by some noble or prelate. Anyhow the abbot of St. Denis became converted to the ways of virtue, and one of the first things he did was to induce the Pope to make over the convent to him on the ground, partly, of the "foul enormity" (in the Pope's language) of the life of the nuns.

This was the general condition of nunneries twenty years after the death of the great reformer Hildebrand. Some chroniclers remark that there was a growth of infanticide by the nuns. But the monasteries were just as gross. Abelard writes that "*almost all* the monasteries of our time" are corrupt. Indeed even in some of the "strict" monasteries the practices were peculiar. In my *Peter Abelard* I quote a monk-bishop of the time scolding Robert of Arbrissel, who had founded and was directing a great convent with nearly four thousand nuns in it,

because one of his penances is "frequently to sleep amongst and with the women"—to mortify his flesh!—and one of the punishments he imposes on the nuns is that they shall be stripped naked.

Abelard after his mutilation—it is characteristic of the time that the great scholar demanded that the uncle of Heloise, a canon of the cathedral, who had hired men to do it, should be punished legally with the same mutilation—entered the abbey of St. Denis. This was eight years before the abbot was converted, and Abelard's description of its "very worldly and most disgraceful life" should be read by any man who wants to know the general condition of a rich monastery in the Middle Ages. The lord abbot was "as much worse in manner of life and more notorious than the rest as he preceded them in dignity." The abbey, a Benedictine monastery, had been in this condition since the last spasm of piety in 994, a century and a quarter earlier, and had not been affected by the reforms of Hildebrand or any other. Soldiers and ladies, dancers, jesters, and conjurors, enlivened its innumerable festivals. St. Bernard, who describes its life, converted its abbot, Suger, in 1127, and the gayety was dimmed; and some years later a veracious chronicler, Guillaume de Nangis, tells us that the monks "scarcely exhibited even the appearance of religion."

Bernard and his Cistercian reformers took one monastery or nunnery after another, sometimes using crooked law proceedings, until they boasted that they controlled eighteen hun-

dred in Europe; but, like all other reforms, this maintained its purity only for a short time. What the more remote and rustic monasteries were like Abelard's experience lets us know. He was appointed abbot of one on the coast of Brittany, and he found his monks all "married," or, as he elsewhere puts it, "known only for their dissoluteness" and their "scandalous debaucheries." They attempted several times to poison him for trying to reform them, and he fled. This, remember, is the age of the great cathedrals and of the new university life, and any man can see that is was abbeys like the unreformed abbey of St. Denis that really preserved Ovid and Catullus for us. It was also the age of the troubadours, and if you know anything of that movement you will realize how it was that the fervor of the new reformers soon spent itself, and the majority of the convents and monasteries again became irregular. A good deal of the troubadour literature, often praising wine and women as the contemporary Persian poets did, was composed by monks. You will find, if you read Latin, some curious specimens in Lea's *History* that were chanted, to hymn tunes, in cloisters all over Europe.

In short, we have again in the thirteenth century, in spite of new reformers like Innocent III, so general a corruption of the monastic world that two new orders, the Franciscan and Dominican, have to be established to meet the requirements of genuine piety; and it is well known in the Franciscan literature which the friars do *not* translate for laymen to read that Francis died of a broken heart because

his order was corrupted in his own short lifetime. The state of the Church in this "beautiful thirteenth century" was almost as gross as ever. Cotter Morison, the Positivist writer, a member of a sect so lenient to the Roman Church that Huxley called it "Catholicism minus Christianity," becomes bitterly ironical in his *Service of Man*, when he notices the general praise of the thirteenth century. Why, it was, he says, "an age of violence, fraud, and impurity such as can hardly be conceived now." He tests it "in its ideal moment," in the France of St. Louis. He opens the official record left by the archbishop of Rouen, a strict monk-prelate, which describes the state of his diocese from 1248 to 1269; and the picture of clerical life is extraordinary. The nuns, Morison says, "compared with the priests appear to have been well-behaved"; and he immediately gives us a description of a convent of thirty-three nuns which, as Dean Milman says, "might almost have put Boccaccio to the blush." Several of the nuns were mothers, and the life was entirely free; yet the Positivist writer repeats that the nunneries "did not afford examples of the gross licentiousness of the monks and priests." The saintly archbishop, he admits, did not even censure the gay ladies, because "perhaps their wealth and social position made it impolitic to do so."

This is the wonderful thirteenth century under a saintly monarch and a saintly archbishop. You will know what to expect under other monarchs and other types of prelates. Dean Milman quotes the Bishop of Liege, an important see. His chief mistress is a Bene-

dictine nun, but his large harem includes several other nuns; and he boasts at a public banquet that fourteen children have been born through his love-affairs in twenty-two months. This is really too much for Rome, and so Pope Gregory X very politely persuades the episcopal Don Juan to abdicate. Thirty years later the world is amused to hear that the Pope himself, Clement V, has a lady friend, and the Papal Court enters upon an almost continuous period of degradation that lasted for more than two hundred years. It is really not worth while quoting evidence for the later Middle Ages. Milman says that the evidence "fully vindicates the truth of Langland, Chaucer, and the Satirists against the English Clergy and Friars in the Fourteenth Century"; and, as the Popes were not in Italy, and Avignon, where they were, was "a sink of iniquity" (Petrarch says) and a "new Babylon"—and he lived near and knew it well—we should be foolish to expect anything else. Nor will anyone expect an improvement in the fifteenth century, which opened with the spiritual rule of the world by an ex-pirate, Pope John XXIII, who was found guilty by the Council of Constance of every vice and crime known to man ("poisoning, murder, persistent addiction to the vices of the flesh," etc.), and closed with the spiritual reign of Alexander VI, whose vices were merely more refined and his murders more subtle.

It must be known even to Mr. Cadman that one of the loudest grievances of the Reformers in the sixteenth century was the general corruption of the clergy, monks, and nuns. Does

he mean to tell his Protestant audience that Erasmus, Luther, Ulrich von Hutten, etc., and all our Protestant historians were quite wrong? Is he asking New York to take something like *The Calvert Handbook of Catholic Facts* (and even this almost shrinks from the subject) as a cultural standard? Has he never heard of Lea's masterly *History of Sacerdotal Celibacy in the Christian Church?* And, if some Roman Catholic has persuaded him that the Jesuitical Father Baumgarten has answered Lea in his *H. C. Lea's Historical Writings*, will he now look up that absurd book and find that it does not even include a mention of Lea's *History of Celibacy?* Or has he heard that the Cardinal Gasquet who has just died earned his pomp and glory by his very questionable attempts to whitewash the English monasteries of the sixteenth century?

You will find an amusing illustration of the value of these Roman Catholic apologies if you look up the first volume of the *Cambridge Modern History.* It is a historical work of highest scholarship, but unfortunately it has the familiar weakness: a Roman Catholic writer is included so as to disarm his Church and get a better circulation. There is not a Catholic scholar in the world who is capable of writing impartial history in such matters. No matter what his private opinions are the Church exacts that he shall temper the truth. The nearest approach to complete truthfulness that I know in a Catholic history is Dr. L. Pastor's *History of the Popes*, and it does tell some very painful truths about the monasteries of the Middle Ages, but it is untruthful in the

emphasis it gives to an ounce of virtue and the little attention it gives to the ton of sin.

The amusing thing, however, is to see how the priest writes when he is admitted to collaborate in an "impartial" historical work. In the Cambridge History Canon W. Barry, who was no historian but an adroit literary man and juggler with words, is invited to write on the state of the Church before the Reformation, and he knows that it is useless to say here what he would say to a purely Catholic audience. Mr. Cadman may be surprised to know that this most resolute and desperate of Catholic apologists admits, "especially amongst the high clergy and in religious associations" [monastic orders], what he calls "a worldliness which has never been surpassed," a "corruption on a scale so wide as in the opinion of many to justify revolt from the Pope and bishops." Barry would have laughed at Cadman's silly denial of the notorious facts. He takes the very different line of showing that the Church leaders were quite aware of the corruption and were anxious for reform. The reasons he gives for the delay are rather childish, it is true, for he must have known that the main reason was that Rome itself was much too comfortable in its corruption to want reform, but taking up this line of argument compels him to admit all the facts. He quotes Bishop Foxe of Winchester writing in 1520 that he has found that "everything belonging to the primitive integrity of the clergy, *especially of the monastic state*, was perverted, either by dispensations or corruptions, or else had become obsolete from age or depraved by the

iniquity of the times." We can quite admit that when the quarrel began, and the king's fat eye glittered at the prospect of seizing the immense wealth of the monks, his commissioners exaggerated the vices of the monks here and there; so servants of the Pope like Gasquet (who gets the red hat and a beautiful funeral for his "scholarship") can come along and discover the occasional exaggeration. But there is ample evidence, like that of Foxe, of a general corruption of the English monasteries.

Barry admits it of Italy and other countries but he hesitates about Germany; clearly so as not to allow too much to Luther. He admits that the Papal Legate Nicholas of Cusa had had to reform hundreds of German monasteries and nunneries in the fifteenth century, and that many (he has no reason to restrict himself to "many") fell back. He tells how one nunnery that was determined not to quit its gay ways sent a troop to murder the Cardinal Legate and the Cardinal got a larger troop and cut them to bits. But Barry, forgetting for the moment that he is writing history and not Catholic Truth, gratuitously says that corruption was "rare in the larger houses" of German monks and nuns.

It is ridiculous. Erasmus, Ulrich von Hutten and Luther—all men who knew the German monasteries intimately—speak of general corruption. But a heavier authority is the Franciscan friar Thomas Murner, a preacher of great ability and immense popularity, a Catholic of such piety that for his invectives against Luther he earned a nickname which the police of Kansas would not permit me to translate

in print. If you can read medieval German get his *Narrenbeschweerung* (Conspiracy of Fools, of which there are several nineteenth-century editions), and see the kind of language that rolled from cathedral pulpits in those spiritual days. It is a collection of sermons in rhymed verse, deliciously caustic, utterly gross. When Friar Thomas wants to say buttocks as he often does in his sermons, he uses the four-lettered word (then the same in German as English). However, my point here is that this zealous Catholic preacher is at one with Ulrich on the morals of the clergy, monks, and nuns. They are generally corrupt. The nun who bears most children gets the post of abbess. And so on. And these are the sermons that made him one of the most popular preachers in Germany about 1510.

Well, I trust, Mr. Cadman, that this will do to go on with. I invite you to broadcast a translation of some of Friar Thomas' poetical sermons (chosen by me) and you will shake America. Sing Sing will be thought too pleasant a place for you. But in my forthcoming book I will give the evidence in full, with chapter and verse, with the original and the modern authorities. I will tell the good as well as the wicked; and any honest man will say that during those thousand years of monasticism, or even the fifteen centuries from the fourth to the nineteenth, the corrupt monasteries and nunneries were enormously more numerous than the virtuous, and every recent manual of medieval history that says or suggests the opposite is untruthful.